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DINING

Hawker trade at crossroads

Debbie Yong examines the evolution of hawker culture in Singapore, and asks where all this is headed

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MODERN HAWKERS

Mr Douglas' two-month-old Maguroya has a two-fold purpose. Besides bringing sashimi-grade fish to diners at pocket-friendly prices, the former Japanese seafood importer also hopes to get more diners to think about sustainability by restricting his produce to only those from fair-trade sources. - PHOTO: DEBBIE YONG

EVER since the government announced last year that it would build 10 new hawker centres over the next decade - the first new ones since 1985 - opinion has been divided over whether there would be enough hawkers willing to take up stalls.

A majority lament the waning of the hawker trade. As skilled hawkers age, many choose to give up their generations-old recipes because they'd rather see their children in salaried jobs than work a hawker's hard slog.

"We're now at a turning point. We cannot go back to the old hawker days," says Deirdre Murugasu of Best of Asia, the social enterprise behind Singapore's first privately run hawker centre, Kampung@Simpang Bedok. "Many hawker centres are hot, sweaty and drab - how do you expect hawkers to be happy? If you present a hawker's life

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